RUSSIAN HOUSES.

AMONG the various materiels used in the construction of these houses wood has the decided preference, and if your correspondent of last week, who wishes to be informed as to the manner in which the Russians construct their dwellings, will consult Dr. Lyell's curious "Essay on the Origin and Progress of Architecture in Russia," he will probably arrive at some interesting information on the subject.

It is stated by Storch that about thirty-five years ago it was not unusual for people of good fortune to build a wooden dwelling for their own particular use adjoining to their mansions, thus comprising the difference between state and convenience. There is a very general impression existing among the Russian nobility that houses of wood are more healthy than those constructed of brick or stone: it is certain that they are warmer, which is a consideration of much importance in such a climate as Russia: they are likewise of comparatively small cost; are speedily erected; and, from the simplicity of their construction, admit of being readily altered and transported from one place to another.

A dwelling or cottage of the common sort generally resembles a square, consisting of a ground floor only, with steep projecting roof covered with thatch or shingles, with the gable end towards the street. Wood, as the principal material used in the erection, is employed with much prodigality, calculated to amaze a stranger aware of the comparative economy with which timber is used in most other countries. The trunk of the tree being barked is divided into requisite lengths, which are laid one upon another, mortieed together at the various angles, and the interstices filled with moss and clay: this method of construction is as much a matter of choice as necessity, the apertures left for light being occasionally of glass or oiled linen: no flues are made, the peasantry having a great aversion to chimneys.

One-fourth of the interior is occupied by an oven, which not only serves to warm the house and to cook victuals, but the top serves as a sleeping-place: if the family are too numerous to find sleeping accommodation, a number of boards are joined together so as to form a shelf, and then fixed on a level with the top of the oven, offering further convenience.

On advancing towards the south of European Russia, timber becomes comparatively scarce, and its wholesale use in building is impracticable: the walls of cottages are then built with mud faced with boards, and frequently the sides are of wicker work plastered over. In the Ukraine, the village habitations stand detached within wattled inclosures, and the walls being whitewashed, the villages have, on the whole, an appearance which reminds an Englishman more strongly of his own country than anything which he has seen, or will see, in the Russian empire. G. J. R.

WHAT OUR AMERICAN BRETHREN OUGHT TO HAVE BEEN DOING.

THE American papers are rather "stale, flat, and unprofitable" at present: in fact, they are filled with information from our own side the water about the all-absorbing object of the world's interest—the International Exhibition.

Dr. Smith, an American, and one of the international jurors, has been sending a series of articles to one paper on "The Palace of Glass." He seems to regret that America is not adequately represented; but it was scarcely reasonable to expect "the new world," divided by three thousand miles of ocean from "the old," to be able even to afford the immense expense beyond that of the other great competitors. The Doctor, however, thinks that Connecticut might have sent a pin machine, a box of clocks, a few wooden nutmegs; and Rhode Island something else; but they have too many of them been caught napping.

There should have been lots of carpets from Lowell; many more of those fine shawls from Lawrence. These are the articles that British manufacturers should have seen—for seeing is believing. Mr. Ames's sword-blades from Cabotville; a lathe turning gun-stocks all alone; another making shoe-lasts out of sticks of wood; a machine cutting and beading nails; a tack machine from Wareham; another for turning oars and handspikes; Mr. Bigelow's coach lace weaving loom, from Clintonville; and above all, Mr. Blanchard's apparatus for turning marble busts, would each have been centres of attraction, had they been put in motion here.

Our fire engines, he thinks, are quite inferior to those in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and the cities of the West. But it is a singular fact, he adds, "that I have not heard the cry of fire for more than a year."

His fellow-countrymen, it would appear, then, have more need of first-rate fire engines than we have: yet we should like to see a little less necessity even for such as we have.

In speaking of hollow-bricks as "a new thing under the sun," he adds, — "If the Medford and other brickmakers would put the date of the year in the bottom of their moulds, each brick, to the remotest epoch of history in the New World, would be an unerring chronicle of incalculable importance to future antiquarians. It will be, at some inconceivably remote period of time, infinitely curious to ascertain by the figures on a common brick, which are more indestructible than ordinary stone, and which will be strewn over the ground everywhere and buried beneath the soil, the phases through which the country has passed, from its infancy, to decrepit old age;" —spoken like an antiquarian *con amore*, or one rather who anticipates the pleasure in some new state of existence himself. Masons' marks on stones and dates on bricks are indeed capable of affording interesting light on obscure subjects of antiquarian research.

A writer, in another paper (taking a lesson from this side the Atlantic too), expatiates on the fine field there *was* in America for the laying out of parks such as our own, which, singularly enough, appear, more than almost anything else, to excite amongst Americans "a sort of bewildered astonishment at the vastness and wealth of a city," which "can afford such an illimitable space for the pleasure of air and exercise to its inhabitants." In point, an anecdote is told to the effect, that—

"In crossing the Atlantic, a young New Yorker, who was rabidly patriotic, and who boasted daily of the superiority of our beloved commercial metropolis over every city on the globe, was our most amusing companion. I chanced to meet him one afternoon a few days after we landed, in one of the great parks in London, in the midst of all the sylvan beauty and human enjoyment I have attempted to describe to you. He threw up his arms as he recognized me, and exclaimed—'Good heavens! what a scene, and *I* took some Londoners to the steps of the City Hall last summer, to show them *the Park* of New York!' I consoled him with the advice to be less conceited thereafter in his cockneyism, and to show foreigners the Hudson and Niagara, instead of the City Hall and Bowling Green.

But the question may well be asked, is New York really not rich enough, or is there absolutely not land enough in America, to give our citizens public parks of more than ten acres?

The New Yorkers are not wholly deaf to appeals like these. The mayor has called the attention of the city authorities to the subject of providing a new and spacious park. The Committee on Lands and Places have reported in favour of the measure, and have recommended for the site the lands known as Jones's Woods, lying between 66th and 75th streets, and extending from the 3rd avenue to the East river. It is proposed that 50,000 drs. with an interest of not less than 5 per cent. be annually paid by taxation until the whole purchase-money is discharged.

Our cities and towns, especially the semi-rural ones, which must always depend, for a principal part of their attractiveness, on their sylvan appearance and open spaces, cannot be too liberal in appropriating forthwith tracts of land for parks and other public uses—not little, contracted, ten-acre lots, but lots in which the acres are counted by hundreds. If this had been done fifty years ago, how we should now bless our progenitors for their forethought! It is not yet too late, in many cases, to make amends for past omissions."

The plan for this great park is, to lay off about half a mile square, between the Third Avenue and the East River, and 75th and 54th Streets. The cost of the land, with the necessary preparation for pleasure-grounds, is estimated at from 250,000 dollars to 500,000 dollars.

The Washington correspondent of the *Journal of Commerce* states, that on the 5th of June "the President held another, and probably a final conference, with the architects and the Cabinet, on the subject of the capitol enlargement. The result is, that a design, made by Mr. Young, of Boston, will probably be the President's choice; but nothing is yet finally decided." It is hoped, if not intended, that the President will be able to lay the corner-stone of the enlarged capitol on the 4th of July next.

We learn from the *Philadelphia North American*, that a Mr. Robinson, a United States man, is about to erect in Sweden and Norway a number of lines of magnetic telegraph. He has been granted a privilege for the enterprise, which is to endure for fifty years; and a company, including several heavy capitalists in New York and Stockholm, has been formed under his auspices.

INDIAN HANDICRAFTS.

AN English engineer in India describes his experiences amongst the native workmen in an amusing article in *Chambers's Journal*, from which the following is condensed.

I had the anvils raised upon wooden blocks, so as to necessitate an erect posture while at work. The poor fellows submitted with the best grace they could, but seemed greatly embarrassed. The queer shaky way in which they stood, and the undecided flexure of the knee and hip-joints, were so indicative of a tendency to flap down on the slightest possible pretence, that it was really impossible to look at them without laughing. The work went on very slowly; but I hoped that all would soon go well: alas! I had under-estimated the tenacity of a race-established precedent; and, so, one afternoon, I found my blacksmiths perched on blocks of wood of the same height as their anvils, and hammering away with all the vigour which the stability of their tottering pedestals admitted of! It was hopeless contending with such a demonstration as this; so, to the great joy of the *lohairs* (blacksmiths), I allowed the anvils to be placed once more on terra firma. Time, which the Englishman values as money, has a very secondary place in the estimation of the Oriental. The *radj*, or bricklayer, is, I think, about the best illustration of this. He works with a trowel about the size of an ordinary tablespoon, and a small hammer weighing about six ounces. Armed with these, and squatting before his work, he, in a loud voice, summons his *rundees* (women, two of whom always wait upon each radj), and orders them to bring *eentee* and *massala* (bricks and mortar). The rundees in due season make their appearance—one with a brick in each hand, and the other with a small wooden trencher, about the size of a bread basket, filled with the massala. I am much within the mark when I say, that a single English bricklayer and hodman could in one day do the work of a dozen radjs, rundees, and all; and do it much better too. One would imagine from this that building was a very expensive process in India; but the contrary is the case. An English bricklayer and hodman will cost from eight to ten shillings a day, while the Indian radj and his two attendant rundees will not cost more than from threepence to fourpence per day.

The writer next attempts to introduce the barrow for earthwork in place of the little cowrie baskets, holding about a spadeful each. After a great deal of see-sawing, one poor fellow managed to deliver his freight. Thinking that a little practice, unembarrassed by my presence, would familiarise them with the barrow, I left them for a time, and on return I beheld the wheel-barrow borne along by four men, very much in the style in which dead men are carried off the stage—that is, two at the head, and two at the feet—palanquin style, in short. A set of lighter ones, little larger than those with which boys are accustomed to amuse themselves in England, was made, and success for a time was complete; but one day, happening to come upon them unexpectedly, there were half-a-dozen of the men walking

To learn about OCR and PDF Compression go to our website